



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

LONG TERM CARE OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM

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HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

PUBLIC HEARING

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TESTIMONY

Of

Nancy Shaffer, State Ombudsman

My name is Nancy Shaffer and I am the State Long Term Care Ombudsman. I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of Raised Bill 989. As a professional in long term care for more than twenty years, I have worked with many Connecticut families as they struggle with the numerous challenges encountered when a loved one is experiencing the devastating effects of Alzheimer's disease.

We know that thousands of Connecticut residents and their families live with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia, often with little to no help as they heroically try to manage on their own. Support for those who are afflicted with the disease and for their caregivers is not only the humane thing to do it is also a cost savings to the healthcare system and to the state. Statistically, caregivers are at high risk for numerous health problems. From emotional support to hands on care these individuals need the help of others in order to maintain the highest quality of life for themselves and their loved one. In my experience in long term care, I can tell you that by far the vast majority of caregivers do everything they possibly can to care for their loved one from one day to the next and to keep them at home for the longest time possible. Providing intermittent respite care for caretakers could mean the difference in keeping their loved one at home or in forcing the agonizing decision to place their loved one into institutional care. Respite care is an invaluable service which can truly save not only the caregiver's emotional and physical well being, but also prolong or eliminate the need for institutionalization.

It is my understanding that the income eligibility standards for the Alzheimer's Respite Program have not been adjusted since the inception of the pilot program in 1997. It is time to reevaluate these standards and to update them to current criteria, to move from a modest annual income limit of thirty thousand to forty-one thousand dollars or to liquid asset from eighty to one hundred nine thousand dollars seems most appropriate after twelve years.

A stated goal of Connecticut government is to prevent individuals from inappropriate nursing home placement and to ensure that individual's reside and receive care in the least restrictive setting of their choice. The Alzheimer's Respite Care Services program helps families to achieve that goal. The Program also helps to maintain the caregiver's own health and safety. This is a win-win situation for Connecticut citizens and for the State of Connecticut. I urge the legislature to provide this added support to families afflicted by Alzheimer's disease.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input on passage of Raised Bill 989.